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# Vicious Circles in Sociology and their Treatment

J. B. HURRY

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# Vicious Circles in Sociology and their Treatment

# Vicious Circles in Sociology and their Treatment

BY

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Author of "Vicious Circles in Disease"

With Illustrations

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*"O wherefore should ill ever flow from ill,*
*And pain still keener pain for ever breed?"*

REVOLT OF ISLAM, Canto V., XI.

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# Preface

"OWING to their close interdependence, social evils often form a Vicious Circle, where evils become in their turn sources of evil." In these words Dr. Newsholme epitomises the subject which will be elaborated in the following pages.

Although Vicious Circles play a *rôle* of great importance in sociology, this monograph is the first to deal with them systematically and claims the indulgence usually granted to the pioneer. *Feci quod potui; melius faciat alter opus.*

This study of the Circle will, it is hoped, be of assistance to the social worker by emphasising the importance of analysing social problems into their constituent factors, and thus facilitating the discovery of the *locus minoris resistentiæ* at which the Circle can best be broken. Only when this has been done will the problem be effectually solved. As important is it for the sociologist as for the physician to be a philosopher.

References to standard authorities have been freely introduced, so that the reader may have before him the evidence on which various propositions are based. Such independent testimony will carry greater weight than an individual opinion would be entitled to.

My daughter Gladys has kindly read through the proof-sheets.

J. B. H.

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# Chapter One

## THE PLACE OF THE CIRCLE IN SOCIOLOGY

N pathology the term Vicious Circle is applied to a morbid process in which a primary disorder provokes a reaction which perpetuates and aggravates the said disorder. This morbid process constitutes a grave complication of disease and frequently terminates fatally.

In sociology Vicious Circles are equally common and equally pernicious. The process is responsible for the perpetuation and aggravation of poverty, of crime, of intemperance, of immorality, and results in wasted lives, wrecked homes, premature decay and death.

In the ordinary course of economic law the reaction provoked by a social disorder tends to rectify the said disorder. By this self-righting mechanism the social organism maintains itself in health. For example, idleness is punished by indigence, crime by social ostracism, inebriety by dyspepsia, insanitation by impaired health, inefficiency by low wages. In all these cases the

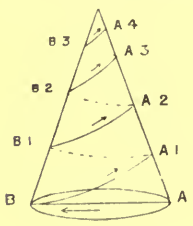
consequences of the primary evil tend to keep it in check.

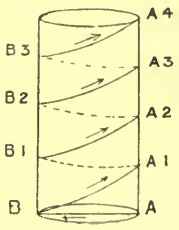
When a Vicious Circle is present the ordinary sequence of events is abolished. The reactions which should be beneficent become maleficent and intensify the disorder. The *vis medicatrix* becomes the *vis devastatrix.*

The accompanying illustrations (Plates One and Two) may assist in the visualisation of the process.[1]

*Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem*
*Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*

[1] Although the expression Vicious Circle is too ancient to be discarded, "vicious spiral" would in some respects be more accurate, and has been so used by B. S. Rowntree (Betting and Gambling, p. 120). The increment is then visualised by the spiral line in one or other of these diagrams. A $A_1$ $A_2$ $A_3$ and B $B_1$ $B_2$ $B_3$ represent the aggravation of the primary and secondary factors in the morbid process.



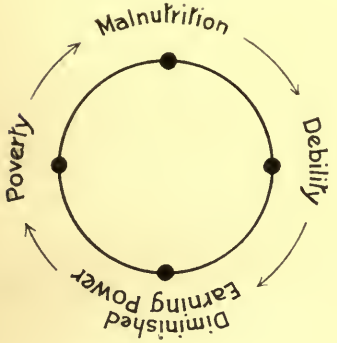



Fig i. POVERTY.

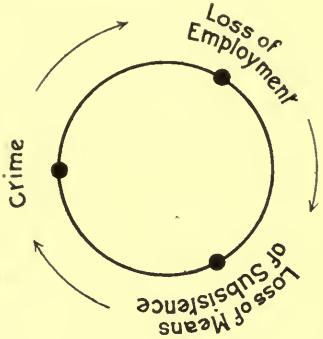



Fig. ii. CRIME.

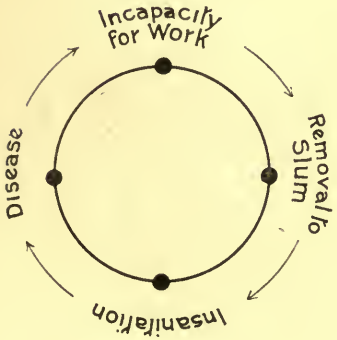



Fig. iii. DISEASE.

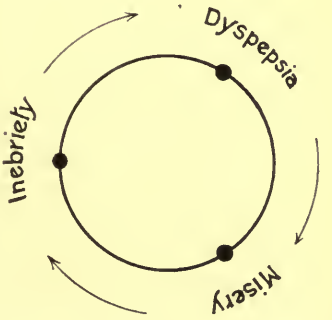



Fig. iv. INEBRIETY.

Plate One.—Vicious Circles in Sociology.

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# Chapter Two

## THE CLASSIFICATION OF CIRCLES

SOME of the Circles met with in sociology may now be described (Plate One). The descriptions must be regarded as suggestive rather than exhaustive.

### (1) Circles associated with Poverty.

Poverty is associated with numerous Circles which render the condition a self-perpetuating one. For example, poverty often leads to insufficient nourishment, to malnutrition, to impaired physical and mental vigour, to diminished earning-power and thus to a perpetuation and aggravation of the poverty. It is not too much to say that this Circle is accountable for a large part of the destitution of our working classes.

Rowntree expresses the idea when he says :

> " What a man can do in 24 hours will depend very much on what he can have to eat in those 24 hours ; or perhaps it would be more correct to say, what he has had to eat the 24 hours previous. If his diet be liberal, his work may be mighty. If he be underfed, he must underwork." [1]

Other Circles are associated with low wages. In many cases the earnings are insufficient to support life unless supplemented by charity or

[1] Poverty, p. 260.

Poor Law relief. This income from extraneous sources in its turn tends to keep down wages.

Mrs. Bosanquet refers to this Circle :

> " These underpaid classes are not self-supporting, but are largely subsidised from without, which alone makes it possible for the present system of unemployment to continue. This of course involves us in a Vicious Circle ; but it is characteristic of social problems to be Vicious Circles, and all that can be done—at any rate on paper—is to point out the links in the chain, and hope that the practical man will some day come along and break through at the weakest place." [1]

Higgs and Hayward deal with the same Circle as affecting women workers whose inadequate wages are supplemented by Poor Law relief :

> " Single women are often unable to earn sufficient to live, even at the lowest standard, and hence turn to the Poor Law for relief . . . There is, here, a Vicious Circle of evil conditions for our women workers. . . . Many of these workers receive Poor Law relief in aid of their wages. This fact, of course, tends to keep wages down, and thus the Circle is complete." [2]

It is notorious that the poor pay higher prices for the necessaries of life than do the rich. This applies to food, to clothing, to fuel, to lighting [3] and to shelter, and arises partly from inadequate storage room, partly from the habit of purchasing minute quantities, partly from ignorance.

[1] The Standard of Life, p. 187.
[2] Where shall she live ? p. 64.
[3] The widespread use of 1d. slot gas meters is an illustration.

As a rule the poorer the family the higher the price paid for necessaries, with the result of increasing poverty.[1]

Charles Booth has pointed out that poverty is associated with earlier marriages and greater fecundity—factors which intensify poverty :

> "As we descend in the scale and find marriage earlier and children more numerous, it may well be questioned whether these features are more the causes or the consequences of the poverty that accompanies them. To my mind while no doubt to some extent a cause, they appear more definitely as consequences."[2]

Blind-alley employments and poverty often act and react injuriously on each other. The commencing wages of an uneducative post are often higher than those of a worker who has to be taught a trade, and this often decides the choice.

As W. H. Beveridge says :

> "The blind-alley occupation very commonly offers to the boy, or rather to the boy's family, considerable immediate advantage in wages over an apprenticeship ; perhaps six or eight shillings a week as against two or four. Where, as in all really poor families, the earnings of the elder children are an integral and long-expected part of the general income it is only natural that such a difference should be decisive. Thus poverty perpetuates itself."[3]

---

[1] J. A. Hobson, Problems of Poverty, p. 9.
[2] Life and Labour of the People of London, Final Volume, p. 19.
[3] Unemployment, p. 214.

Other Circles associated with poverty will be discussed in subsequent sections.

(2) Circles Associated with Unemployment.

Unemployment is frequently complicated by secondary conditions which prolong the unemployment. A man who is out of work through no fault of his own may be compelled to pawn his clothes and his tools. Hence result lessened respectability and fitness for employment, which diminish his prospects of securing work.

The psychical depression and loss of self-reliance which result from unemployment also militate against the worker.

Rowntree and Lasker write :

> " We recognise immediately in the case of youths how mischievous a period of unemployment is, and, speaking generally, it is no less mischievous to adults. Even men of strong character tell us how exceedingly difficult it is to resist this demoralisation, which is partly due to psychical and partly to physical causes. They suffer psychically, because of the depression . . . and physically, because unemployment is so often accompanied by an insufficient supply of nutritious food and the other necessaries of life. Thus the health is rapidly undermined, and with it the power to resist demoralising influences and the determination to maintain a high standard of living." [1]

[1] Unemployment, p. 60.

(3) Circles Associated with Disease.

Disease and all forms of impaired health greatly diminish earning-power. They thus tend to deprive the worker of the medical aid, food and clothing that are essential if the duration of illness is to be curtailed.

Illustrations of this Circle will occur to every social worker, tuberculosis being one of the most common.[1]

John Burns has well said :

> " Tuberculosis is a pauperiser, and pauperism is the seed-plot of tuberculosis."

Dr. Priestley also alludes to this Circle :

> " Untreated and unrecognised early cases cause ill-health, and a consequent lowering of the capacity for work, followed by an irregular employment and encroaching poverty, resulting in poor and less nourishing food, and greater susceptibility to the disease. In this way the Vicious Circle is maintained." [2]

Dr. Boobbyer has drawn attention to the morbid correlations between sickness and destitution amongst the lower classes :

> " The lower we go in the social scale of any civilised states, the greater the amount of sickness we discover. . . . We must raise the status and earning capacity of such people before we can economically

[1] Many examples will be found in " Vicious Circles in Disease," by J. B. H.

[2] *Practitioner*, 1913, Vol. I., p 359.

deal with them; but seeing that their unfortunate case revolves in a Vicious Circle of reciprocal and successive cause and effect, effect and cause, it is difficult to see how it is to be improved by any method that does not involve considerable gratuitous outlay." [1]

Almost every disease is aggravated by the co-existence of destitution, these two factors intensifying each other.

"The man who is ill becomes destitute, and to all the horrors of illness are added all the horrors of destitution, each acting and reacting on the other." [2]

The most pauperising diseases after tuberculosis are probably bronchitis, rheumatism and heart disease, and they in turn are aggravated by poverty.

(4) Circles Associated with Crime.

Many factors associated with crime promote a recurrence of the offence. [3]

---

[1] National Conference for the Prevention of Destitution, 1912, p 17.

[2] National Conference for the Prevention of Destitution, 1911, p. 13.

[3] Aristotle has an interesting chapter on the relation between conduct and character, in which he shows how these factors act and react on each other. "Acts of any kind produce habits or characters of the same kind"; and again: "By doing just acts we become just, and by doing acts of temperance and courage we become temperate and courageous." The same is equally true of evil action. Nicomachean Ethics, tr. by Peters, Book II., Ch. I.

Thus crime leads to loss of reputation, to dismissal from a situation, to difficulty of earning an honest livelihood and thus to more crime.

The influence of suggestion is responsible for much imitative crime. It is notorious that the wide-spread publicity given to some offences provokes a crop of similar cases. Especially is the temptation to imitation operative in neuropathic individuals.

Schiller well expressed the idea :

> " Das eben ist der Fluch der bösen That,
> Dass sie fortzeugend Böses muss gebären." [1]

The introduction to prison life often paves the way for further crime.

As W. Booth said :

> " At present every prison is more or less a training-school for crime, an introduction to the society of criminals." [2]

In Prince Kropotkin's words : " Prisons are the Universities of crime."

According to Lombroso the police surveillance of delinquents is responsible for many offences, since such surveillance makes it difficult for the criminal to obtain or retain employment.

---

[1] " This is the curse of evil deed
That of new evil it becomes the seed."

[2] In Darkest England and the Way Out, p. 74.

> "The surveillance is a cause of new crimes, and it certainly is a cause of the distress of delinquents: for by denouncing them to respectable people through their personal visits, the police prevent their getting or keeping employment. Crime leads to surveillance, and this prevents those who are watched from finding work, a Circle that is even more fatal when they are sent to a residence far from their native country." [1]

### (5) Circles Associated with Inefficiency.

Inefficiency due to inadequate training and experience often creates a Circle by leading to badly paid work and low wages which prevent the worker from obtaining better training and wider experience.

In Rowntree's words:

> "Unfitness means low wages, low wages means insufficient food, insufficient food unfitness for labour, so that the Vicious Circle is complete. The children of such parents have to share their privations, and even if healthy when born, the lack of sufficient food soon tells upon them. Thus they often grow up weak and diseased, and so tend to perpetuate the race of the 'unfit.'" [2]

This Circle has also been referred to by Newsholme in reference to the premature employment of children, especially at casual work:

> "The premature employment of children, and, worst of all, their employment at casual labour which does not lead to their being prepared for adult work,

[1] Crime, Its Causes and Remedies, p. 352.
[2] Poverty, p. 46.

is an excellent example of the Vicious Circle. Presumably the sole earnings of the father do not, in many of these cases, suffice for a normal standard of living of the family, and poverty, as well as social custom, is responsible for this early employment of children to the detriment of their normal growth and their efficiency in adult life." [1]

Feeble-mindedness is another important cause of inefficiency and perpetuates itself by the inebriety and destitution so often associated with it.

Thus J. T. Rae writes :

> " Inebriety as a causation of feeble-mindedness, and feeble-mindedness as a causal factor in inebriety : inebriety as a causation of destitution, and destitution as a causal factor in inebriety cannot be dissociated, either from the other."

And again :

> " Defective units are at once the causal factor in that inebriety or inefficiency which brings destitution, and in that destitution which perpetuates inebriety." [2]

Ignorance and apathy are other factors which combine with inefficiency to form self-perpetuating conditions.

Cadbury and Shann lay emphasis on these factors :

---

[1] Journal of the Royal Sanitary Institute, Vol. XXX. (1909), p. 311. Cf. also Dunlop and Denman, English Apprenticeship and Child Labour, p. 347.

[2] National Conference on the Prevention of Destitution, 1912, pp. 543-5.

"Little can be expected from the workers themselves in the way of reform, for while their present inadequate wage is due to ignorance, apathy and immobility, yet in turn the present low wages perpetuate their demoralised condition. The Vicious Circle in which they so helplessly move is complete."

And again :

"Sweating is the greatest cause of sweating, for, out of the demoralising conditions which it creates, the poisonous system is enabled to perpetuate itself."[1]

Inefficiency and degradation of character are closely associated with sweating, each factor tending to perpetuate the other.

Thus B. and S. Webb write :

"We are thus in a Vicious Circle where sweating itself creates the condition for the sweating system."[2]

According to J. A. Hobson the Circle associated with relative inefficiency is responsible for the lower wages so often paid to women :

"These elements of inferior physique and manual skill, lower intelligence and mental capacity, lack of education and knowledge of life, irregularity of work, more restricted freedom of choice, must in different degrees contribute to the inferior productivity of women's industrial labour.

These influences must be regarded not merely as causes of low wages but also as effects. This constant conception of the interaction of the phenomena we are regarding as cause and effect is essential to a

[1] Sweating, pp. 79, 87.

[2] Problems of Modern Industry, p. 146.

scientific conception of industrial society. Women are paid low wages because they are relatively inefficient workers, but they are also inefficient workers because they are paid low wages." [1]

### (6) Circles Associated with Over-Crowding.

Over-crowding, with its associated insanitation, depreciates health, diminishes energy, lessens the output of work and thus prevents such higher wages as would pay the rent of a healthier home. Moreover, insufficient storage accommodation compels the purchase of the necessaries of life in small quantities and consequently at higher cost.

E. E. Hayward thus deals with the far-reaching effects of over-crowding and insanitation :

> " Those who know the slums realise how large a factor such environment must be in the generally low standard of health amongst the urban population. This low standard of health plays directly into the hands of immorality, intemperance, gambling, thriftlessness, and the other vices rampant in our slum areas. The general squalor everywhere apparent, both inside and outside the home of the slum-dweller, breaks down resistance to these evils. Indulgence in them only causes more and more of the squalor. Thus the Vicious Circle, with which we are all getting so familiar in the social problem, goes on its evil round." [2]

[1] The Evolution of Modern Capitalism, p. 304.

[2] National Conference on the Prevention of Destitution, 1912, p. 133.

The French poet Manuel thus pictures the effects of miserable homes :

> "Mais ce sont les taudis et les foyers sans flamme,
> Les bouges sans soleil pour le corps et pour l'âme,
> Et les réduits infects, pleins de navrants secrets,
> Qui font rester le pauvre au fond des cabarets." [1]

### (7) Circles Associated with Inebriety.

Several reciprocally acting correlations occur in inebriety. For example, excessive indulgence gives rise to gastritis, associated with a sense of exhaustion and misery, which tempt to further indulgence.

Thus Müller writes :

> " Indulgence in alcohol is liable to be followed by a sense of despondency, which provokes to further excess, and thus establishes a Vicious Circle from which the victim is unable to escape." [2]

Another common result of inebriety is fatty degeneration of the heart, associated with palpitation, faintness and pain. In order to relieve these symptoms the sufferer often flies to the bottle, thus paving the way for accelerated degeneration.

Again inebriety, like other forms of vicious indulgence, diminishes self-control, and so tends to further inebriety. This mischievous process is commonly observed in neurasthenia.

---

[1] " Ouvriers."

[2] Handbuch der Neurasthenie, p. 255.

McBride thus refers to this Circle :

> " The instability of the nerve force in neurasthenic individuals induces the taking of alcohol, which in turn increases the instability, this leading to excessive use of the stimulant with increased disturbance, and thus the Vicious Circle goes on, to the complete undoing of the victim." [1]

Social misery of every description may be associated with inebriety, both as cause and effect. For a time the alcohol may drown the misery in oblivion. In the words of Solomon : " Give wine unto the bitter in soul : let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." [2] But the stage of oblivion is brief. As a rule alcoholism, sooner or later, intensifies the misery.

Hack Tuke emphasises the relations of alcoholism to pauperism :

> " There exists a Vicious Circle between pauperism and alcoholism, the former contributing to the genesis of the latter, and the latter in its turn contributing to maintain the former." [3]

Hillquit also says :

> " As is the case with almost all the social evils of the day, the cause and effect of alcoholism move in a seemingly unbreakable Vicious Circle—misery causes drunkenness, drunkenness increases misery." [4]

---

[1] The Modern Treatment of Alcoholism and Drug Narcotism, p. 78.

[2] Proverbs, Ch. XXXI., v. 6.

[3] Dictionary of Psychological Medicine, Vol. I., p. 64.

[4] Socialism in Theory and Practice, p. 312. Other illustrations will be found in " Chronic Alcoholism and its Vicious Circles," by J. B. H., in the British Journal of Inebriety, 1915, Vol. XIII., p. 13.

(8) Circles Associated with Narcomania.

Indulgence in narcotics establishes a dangerous, and sometimes a fatal, Circle. The commonest form is indulgence in morphia which induces neurasthenia, diminishes self-control and thus promotes further indulgence. Especially is this Circle liable to affect neuropaths.

Curschmann writes :

> " Morphia has the unfortunate characteristic that its prolonged use establishes a habit which requires ever increasing doses in order to produce the similar effect. Moreover, when continued it gives rise to unpleasant and even serious disorders, if there is temporary abstention from the drug, which disorders can only be removed by a fresh dose of morphia.
>
> As long as the physician carries out the injections, the phenomena due to use and to abstention can be controlled and kept within bounds. But when once the patient begins to use the syringe, at first in order to subdue pain and afterwards to obtain the euphoria induced by the morphia, the Vicious Circle is closed. For this Circle leads to ever increasing injections, and hence to the phenomena of chronic morphinism." [1]

The effects of morphia and alcohol *accoutumance* are very similar, as Fleury points out :

> " Alcoholism and morphinomania are complicated by the same Vicious Circle. Abstinence causes misery which is only relieved by further indulgence, and this in its turn perpetuates, and before long aggravates, the misery." [2]

---

[1] Lehrbuch der Nervenkrankheiten, p. 903.
[2] La Médecine de l'Esprit, pp. 344, 351.

(9) Circles Associated with Gambling.

Gambling may be defined as the determination of the ownership of property by an appeal to hazard and frequently springs from dissatisfaction with the monotony of life and a craving for excitement. Such a craving is doubtless temporarily assuaged by resort to hazard. But the elation is sooner or later inevitably followed by disappointment, irritation and depression. Hence originates a craving for renewed excitement which grows by what it feeds on.

Alcoholism, narcomania, betting and gambling are illustrations of what may be called habit Circles. Every indulgence weakens self-control and paves the way for recurrence.

(10) Circles Associated with Demoralisation.

Some of the Circles described above, such as narcomania and unemployment, are intimately associated with demoralisation. But under this comprehensive heading various other conditions of an allied character may be grouped. Mental and physical indolence, thriftlessness, immorality, personal uncleanliness all tend to self-perpetuation and self-aggravation.

For instance, where there is weakness of *morale*, either congenital or acquired, the constant struggle

for a livelihood frequently paralyses ambition. The worker loses heart in the struggle and every failure leaves him with less self-reliance and a feebler *morale*.

Marshall describes the Circles associated with the demoralisation of badly paid workers, and emphasises the "cumulative effects" of the process :

> "The sufferings that result are of different kinds : those, the effects of which end with the evil by which they were caused, are not generally to be compared in importance with those that have the indirect effect of lowering the character of the workers or of hindering it from becoming stronger. For these last cause further weakness and further suffering, which again in their turn cause yet further weakness and further suffering, and so on cumulatively. On the other hand high earnings, and a strong character, lead to greater strength and higher earnings, which again lead to still greater strength and still higher earnings and so on cumulatively." [1]

The Poor Law, when injudiciously administered, tends strongly to demoralisation : the very machinery devised to relieve pauperism aggravates the evil. The poor are educated to look to the Guardians for relief as soon as they feel the pinch of poverty, instead of exerting themselves to find work. Hence workhouses, intended as instruments of regeneration, have become the sources of wide-spread social corruption.

[1] Principles of Economics, 4th Ed., pp. 643, 653.

Ward writes :

> " It is easy to create a class of paupers or mendicants by simply letting it be known that food or alms will be given to those who ask." [1]

Indiscriminate charity is another fertile source of evil. Frequently it is both parent and child of mendicancy.

In Loch's eloquent words :

> " Charity unwisely administered is capable of doing incalculable harm to its recipients. . . . Charity which, for love or pity's sake, seduces the individual from the wise and natural toilsomeness of life, or which does not induce him to bear the burden by helping him to overcome his weakness and pushing him forward to self-maintenance is . . . the poor man's greatest foe—greatest because it comes like an angel of loving-kindness, and yet produces far-reaching woe like a spirit of evil." [2]

Miss Octavia Hill is equally trenchant :

> " I am quite awed when I think what our impatient charity is doing to the poor of London : men, who should hold up their heads as self-respecting fathers of families, learning to sing like beggars in the streets—all because we give pennies : those who might have a little fund in the Savings Banks discouraged because the spendthrift is at least as abundantly helped when time of need comes." [3]

W. Booth lays emphasis on the difficulty of personal cleanliness amongst the poor, and points out its influence on *morale* :

---

[1] Pure Sociology, p. 61.
[2] Annual Charities Register and Digest, 1913, p. III.
[3] Charity Organisation Society, Occasional Papers, Series I., p. 17.

> "If you talk to any men who have been on the road for a lengthened period, they will tell you that nothing hurts their self-respect more, or stands more fatally in the way of getting a job than the impossibility of getting their little things done up and clean." [1]

Lastly, attention may be drawn to the interrelation between the individual and an unwholesome environment. Especially is this influence potent during childhood.

Margaret Alden writes:

> "The fact is that we recognise much more to-day the influence of environment. The conditions which create the child criminal cannot be changed by the child himself, they must be changed by the State. . . . We have seen that the poor move in a kind of Vicious Circle, partly creating conditions of disease, vice and poverty, while in their turn they are partly manufactured by these same conditions, so that for their children there is little hope, unless they can be segregated altogether from the large class which ignorantly endures this form of existence." [2]

[1] In Darkest England and the Way Out, p. 100.

[2] Child Life and Labour, p. 138.

# Chapter Three

## THE CO-EXISTENCE OF CIRCLES

FOR the sake of clearness, the various social disorders enumerated above have been dealt with separately. As a rule, however, several of them are in simultaneous operation, and the effect is then cumulative.

Newsholme thus describes the reciprocal interaction of various factors such as poverty, malnutrition, insanitation and alcoholism :

> " The conditions which accompany poverty, such as protracted exposure to infection, insufficient nutrition and ignorance, work in a Vicious Circle with the conditions that cause it, till it is difficult or impossible to distinguish those elements of poverty representing destitution and relievable by the provision of ampler means, from those which are of an origin independent of material supplies, and which would persist even in a community free from economic deficiencies." [1]

And again :

> " Alcoholism can scarcely be placed in its proper relation to other causes of excessive infantile mortality, unless it is regarded as a part of a Vicious

[1] The Prevention of Tuberculosis, p. 244.

Circle of which ignorance and carelessness, poverty—in the sense of privation of some of the necessaries of life,—and insanitary houses, yards and streets, form other important portions. . . . Alcoholism is an important cause, it may also be an associated phenomenon, or a result of poverty." [1]

Muthu also describes the co-existence of Circles :

" Tuberculosis goes hand in hand with other evil factors in the Vicious Circle—viz. competition, overcrowding, poverty, drink, a life of bustle and excitement." [2]

And again :

" Poverty creates a vicious atmosphere in which drink and disease, slums and overcrowding, vagrancy and homelessness, crime and insanity, go to form a Circle. All the social evils gather round poverty, drink and overcrowding. There is a difference of opinion as to whether poverty is the outcome of drink, or drink creates conditions of poverty. It is indeed very difficult to separate the causes and effects of these two evils, as they act and react upon each other with greater and greater intensity, and from one generation to another." [3]

Another writer on social questions says :

" Poverty, uncleanliness, overcrowding, alcoholic indulgence and disease are closely interrelated in Vicious Circles." [4]

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[1] Medical Report of the Local Government Board, 1909-10, pp. XXVII–VIII.

[2] Pulmonary Tuberculosis and Sanatorium Treatment, p. 117.

[3] Pulmonary Consumption and Sanatorium Treatment, p. 169.

[4] Year Book of Social Progress, 1913–14, p. 434.

# Chapter Four

## THE BREAKING OF THE CIRCLE

WHEN disease is complicated by a Vicious Circle, the first task of the physician is to break the Circle, to interrupt its morbid gyrations. In Sir Lauder Brunton's words: "If we can break through the Circle at one point, we allow recovery to commence."

The same principle applies to Vicious Circles in sociology (Plate Two). No treatment will be of permanent benefit that fails to accomplish this object. There are, alas! numerous quack remedies, e.g. doles, stimulants, narcotics, imprisonments, which aggravate, in lieu of curing, the evil.

Newsholme thus describes some methods of breaking the Circle which may illustrate a general principle:

> "As a part of the Vicious Circle already mentioned, insanitation occupies a position against which effective action is at once practicable in every district in which public opinion is equal to the effort. Insanitation, including overcrowding, is a serious cause of disease, and disease in its turn is an important cause of poverty. Hence by a vigorous campaign

against the conditions producing disease much poverty can be prevented; alcoholism and consequent neglect of children can be diminished; and child mortality can be lowered; and this remains true, although it is also true that poverty, alcoholism and moral defects are fertile sources of excessive child mortality. A Vicious Circle has one excellent virtue. It can be snapped at different points, as opportunity best serves, and the sequence of events can thus be inhibited. The greatest hope of success is secured when workers at different parts of the Circle co-operate for the common end." [1]

And again:

"Owing to their close interdependence, social evils often form a Vicious Circle, where evils become in their turn sources of evil. This fact is occasionally mentioned as a reason for disheartenment or even despair. On the contrary, it often justifies the most hopeful optimism; for a Circle can be broken at any elected point, which would naturally be that of least resistance. Bad housing, overcrowding, a comfortless home, or the desire to stand well with his companions may all lead the man of weak will into alcoholic habits, and it is satisfactory to remember that his recovery may be aided or even secured by reducing the opportunities of temptation by more rational provisions for recreation, by a different method of wage payment, or by ameliorative measures directed to the condition of his home. The fact that social evils commonly exist as Vicious Circles is an argument rather for solidarity of effort on the part of all voluntary and official workers, than for discouragement over the difficulty of the task." [2]

[1] Medical Report of the Local Government Board, 1909–10, p. XXIX.

[2] Journal of the Royal Sanitary Institute (1909), Vol. XXX., p. 310.

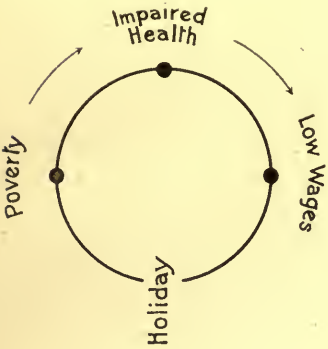


Fig. i. POVERTY.

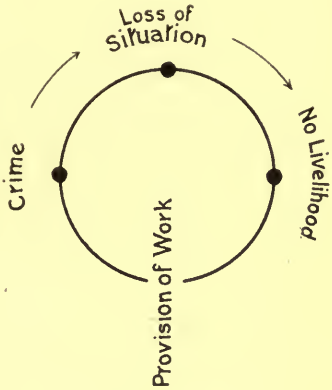


Fig. ii. CRIME.

Fig. iii. DISEASE.

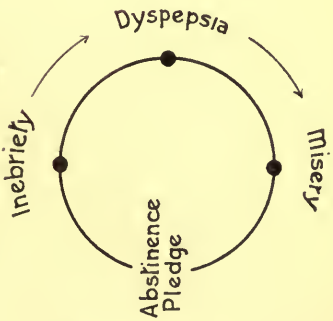


Fig. iv. INEBRIETY.

## Plate Two.—The Breaking of the Circle.

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The Royal Commission on the Poor Laws also refers to the importance of aiming at lasting results, which can only be secured by breaking the Circle :

> "It is now generally agreed that if charitable relief is to be of lasting service to the individual and his family, and is to promote the well-being of the community, some such lines as the following must be adopted. Each application for aid or each case of distress should be considered individually, not merely in relation to the possibility or desirability of granting an allowance or making a gift—and so closing the matter, but in relation to some purpose or plan, which, if it be properly carried out, should produce lasting results." [1]

The first task of the sociologist therefore is to extricate from the symptom-complex those dominant factors that constitute the Circle, to discover the weakest link in the unending chain, and to effect a breach at the point of least resistance. It is indeed one of the advantages of the Circle that it may be interrupted at different points of its circumference and that the ordinary sequence of events may thus be arrested. The evil that is understood in all its details is most easily rectified. The discovery of the disease is half the cure. *Qui bene diagnoscit bene medebitur.*

It is beyond the purpose of this paper to discuss the methods of breaking individual Circles. An analysis of the factors concerned will often suggest the best remedy.

[1] Majority Report (1909), Vol. II., p. 8.

The chief problem is usually concerned with poverty, the factor that complicates so many social disorders. The provision of suitable employment, the teaching of a trade, the removal to a healthier home, an outfit in clothes and tools, temporary assistance in securing more abundant and nutrient food, a holiday at the seaside or in the country may in different circumstances be effectual means of releasing from bondage, and thus allowing the healthy economic forces to resume their beneficent sway. The *vis devastatrix* will then be replaced by the *vis medicatrix*. Divert the current and the Vicious will become a healthy Circle. The hound which had turned to hunt its own tail will once more follow the scent. Higher wages will mean healthier homes, more abundant food, increased physical and mental activity and greater self-respect, factors which in turn conduce to further rise in wages. Again, abstinence from alcohol will mean more money spent at home, better provision for domestic comforts, less querulous wife and children, and less temptation to resort to the public-house.

# Chapter Five

## CONCLUSION

ALTHOUGH this monograph is far from exhaustive, enough has been said to establish several propositions :

Firstly. Many social disorders are complicated by the presence of a Circle.

Secondly. This complication aggravates and perpetuates such disorders.

Thirdly. In order to effectually remedy such disorders they must be analysed into the reciprocally acting factors. This will facilitate the discovery of the *locus minoris resistentiæ*.

Fourthly. Since every gyration deepens the groove and makes escape the more difficult, the social reformer must ever bear in mind, and act upon, the aphorism of Cicero : "Omne malum nascens opprimitur : inveteratum fit plerumque robustius."[1]

---

[1] "Every evil is easily checked at its beginning : if allowed to grow it generally gathers in strength."

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